

FINAL FANTASY XIII REMINISCENCE ~Tracer of Memories~

Chapter 6: Noel Kreiss & Paddra Nsu-Yeul

 kaiho-sha.tumblr.com/post/89963478787/final-fantasy-xiii-reminiscence-tracer-of



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It is 7 in the morning, and Aoede is navigating her way through a market that has already begun showing signs of activity...

She is somewhere in the subtropics, and all around her people are dressed in colourful ethnic costumes. From the market she enters a backroad, and at the end of the alley there's a wooden two-storey house, a little plain but far from shabby. It is an open structure, suited to the humid climate, and the door might as well not have been there. Aoede calls out a greeting as she enters the house, which turns out to be a lot better kept than expected.

"So it's you."

A voice calls out from the second floor, and there, leaning on the railing of the open stairwell, stands a young man. The sunlight from the windows leaves his face in shadow, but his eyes gleam in the dark. Aoede thinks to herself that these eyes, clear yet inscrutable, are like those of a hunter coolly sizing up his prey. Like the eyes of a bloodhound – or a cat.

In a flash, the young man jumps from the stairwell and, without making a sound, lands on his feet before Aoede; all this reinforces Aoede's impression of Noel Kreiss as a cat.

Noel: "I heard from Snow. So you want to know about "that other world"."

Aoede: "Yes, if I may. I used to be a part of that world too."

Noel: "So I heard. But I've never had the opportunity to talk about it. No one would believe a story like that."

Without relaxing his stance, Noel asks Yeul, standing in a doorway behind Aoede, for her opinion. Yeul looks at Aoede for a long moment, and decides she can be trusted, because Aoede will believe them. Noel, with a sigh, says that if Yeul says so, it must be alright. Aoede hears the gentle turn in his voice, and thinks that, for Noel, Yeul's opinion and judgment must come before everything else.

They sit down and begin to talk. Yeul sits stiffly, her back ram-rod straight, while Noel is the very picture of relaxation, but Aoede knows that she must not be deceived; underlying Noel's relaxed posture is the assured knowledge that he can handle anything that might conceivably happen. It occurs to Aoede that Noel is not only like a cat, but also has

the aura of the vigilant guard dog.

Noel relates his story, his life in AF700, the Farseers, Caius, and his time-travel adventures with Serah.

Noel: “Serah’s death, the destruction of the world, they weren’t the fault of Caius alone. I had a hand in it too.”

Aoede: “But it was a trap set by Caius, wasn’t it? You just didn’t know it then. Snow told me that it wasn’t your fault.”

Noel: “It’s one of those things you can’t shrug off as inevitable, and it isn’t something you allow yourself to forget either. I couldn’t stop thinking there might have been a different way, or how I might have done better, and prevented all of it... I had 500 years, more than enough time to second-guess myself and regret my actions.”

“...Eventually, I even came to understand how Caius must have felt when he tried to destroy the world for Yeul.”

Aoede is surprised at his frank confession, and Noel begins to talk of how he led his life in the Age of Chaos. Aoede explains she’s heard about the Conseil de Renaissance, and how it was the core of human society.

Noel: “It was thanks to Sazh and his pep talks – you know, “When things look ugly, it’s time for you young ‘uns to step up!”, things like that. I was grateful to have work to do, to fix my mistakes. I couldn’t think my way out of the darkness, and without something to do, I would have lost it.”

Aoede: “You were deeply troubled by what you’d done to the world, I see. But I also heard that you teamed up with Snow to fight the monsters originating from the Chaos.”

Noel: “It wasn’t just the two of us, a lot of people joined in the fight, too. We formed something like a patrol. Snow was our captain, but I guess The Boss describes his role better. He rallied the troops and was the first to charge in whenever there was danger.”

Aoede: “Were you his second-in-command?”

Noel: “Technically I was, but most of the time I broke off from the squad and went at it solo. Recon and infiltration missions, hunting down monsters, that sort of thing.”

Aoede: “So you were a one-man flying column, or should I say, a lone hunter.”

Noel: “It’s not as cool as it sounds. To be honest I was a little afraid of showing myself in public. I damaged the world, and because of that I could never bring myself to work at the center of society like Hope and Snow. I was ashamed, felt I had no right to the light of day, so I decided to do my best for society from the shadows. Snow understood, and he was okay with letting me do things my way.”

Aoede: “So the both of you trusted each other. But I heard that when you first met Snow in your time-travels, the two of you didn’t get along.”

Noel: “That’s a given. He was too reckless. At that time, I was desperately doing my best to protect Serah, and yet there he was, biting off more than he could chew, and *this* close to kicking the bucket. I thought, “I’m trying my best to protect your sweetheart here, and you’re going to up and die on her first?” It was only natural for me to want to say a thing or two to his face.”

Aoede: “You couldn’t stand his type?”

Noel: “Not exactly. I think I must have known, deep down, that he was a good guy. Maybe I was afraid he was going to push himself too far and buy it, so I gave him a piece of my mind even though it really wasn’t any of my business.”

Aoede suggests that Noel now see things as they are, and is able to understand how he and Snow felt back then.

Noel: “He was definitely reckless, but he wasn’t *only* reckless. He drew out the best in people. He never grew out of being the kid who thought he was the king of the sandbox, and everyone around him had to make sure he stayed out of trouble, and I think, maybe, all of us who watch over him end up being inspired by him to do our best. That was what I came to understand in the Age of Chaos. After years, decades, of fighting, when everyone was exhausted and about to throw in the towel, Snow was out there in the front lines, risking his life, and he showed all of us what the back of a fighter must look like. He risked his life to put the wind back in our sails, and we found courage in his actions.”

Aoede: “I see, he was the hero whose actions spoke louder than words.”

Noel: “I couldn’t protect the person he loved, Serah, and he should have hated me for it. And yet he never once said a word of accusation.”

Noel briefly pauses here, and continues, a little shakily.

Noel: “...That was too much for me to bear. It even occurred to me that it would have been easier on me if he had yelled at me. Serah, the Chaos, everything, if only he had yelled “It’s all your fault!”, I might have been able to defend myself, tell him “No, it’s Caius’s fault!”, shrug it all off – I went as far as imagining that. You must think that’s very self-centred of me.”

Aoede is sympathetic; she mentions that that was also what happened to Sazh: he felt guilty for being miserable and began to distance himself from the others.

Noel: “First I’ve heard of it. So that’s why Sazh stopped meeting us... But I know how he must have felt. After 300 years living in the Age of Chaos, I began to see everything in a negative light. And then *that* happened, and that was the final blow.”

Aoede: “You mean Hope being “spirited away”.”

Noel: “I know now that Bhunivelze was behind it. But back then, we had no way of finding out what happened. I thought there was no way Hope abandoned all his work and disappeared, he was too responsible to do something like that, and he’d worked so hard to save the world. And besides, Hope wasn’t the only one who disappeared. The scientists working on their research in the manmade Cocoon also went missing, all of them.”

Aoede: “What kind of research were they doing in the Cocoon?”

Noel: “It had something to do with controlling the Chaos... you’ll have to ask Hope for the details. Anyway there was no explaining it, and the Conseil de Renaissance fell to pieces trying to pass the buck around. It was dangerous times upon our society, and Snow and I had our work cut out for us trying to maintain public order. Eventually we got so busy we no longer had time to meet up.”

Aoede: “In the meantime, “the salvation of God” began to seduce the hearts of the people. Almighty Bhunivelze will lead us all to the new world – that was the teachings of the Order, whose influence began to spread.”

Noel: “The Order had the most to gain with Hope’s disappearance. I thought it was possible that the Order kidnapped Hope, so I went on an infiltration mission to find out.”

Aoede: “And did you find any evidence of that?”

Noel: “Not a single one. Still, the Order’s way of doing things didn’t sit right with me. They said they were saving souls, dressed their words all pretty, but the moment they were in control they cracked down on everyone who defied them. So I snuck into their cathedral and, well, gave them a “stern warning”. Because of that some people began to call me “The Shadow Hunter”.”

“Meanwhile, I heard that Snow was trying to prevent the Order from monopolizing the supplies, and he chose to compromise to avoid direct conflict with the Order.”

“When I found out he accepted the title of “Patron” from the Order, I thought he’d sold his soul to the teachings of a shady God. But deep down, I must have known what he was thinking. Battling it out with the Order would mean men killing each other, and the way he handled it allowed him to retain control of Yusnaan and the manufacturing plant, while also keeping the Order at bay. I knew that was the truth... but at the same time I didn’t want to understand.”

Without Hope to hold them together, the old friends drifted apart. 13 years before the end of the world, Vanille and Fang woke up, but Noel had virtually nothing to do with them. At the same time, rumours of “the Saviour” began to spread.

Noel: “That was when that girl Lumina appeared. Nobody knew where she came from. It was a mystery, because no children could have been born with the Chaos around. And then the “Oracle Drive” turned up.”

Aoede: “I’ve heard about Oracle Drives from Serah. They are the recordings of “future prophecies” seen by the Farseers, by every generation of Yeul.”

Noel: “I know it all too well. And that was exactly why I was deceived.”

Aoede: “Deceived?”

Noel: “It was a fake prophecy Lumina made. The things recorded, they were nothing more than images of a future I wanted badly. Meeting Yeul again, living our lives together in peace – it was a future I wanted to make happen, and to have it I would have done anything.”

Aoede: “I suppose you were looking for your salvation in the prophecy. What drove you to it?”

Noel: “Despair. It was beyond what I could shoulder so I clung desperately to hope. I thought to myself, I don’t care if I have to stain my hands with blood. The prophecy, it told a certain story.”

“If I defeat “the Saviour” – if I defeat Lightning, a future of peace awaits us. So I tried to kill her.”

Aoede: “You had no qualms about fighting Lightning?”

Noel: “...do you remember? I said I know how Caius must have felt.”

“Serah’s death, the destruction of the world – I continued to beat myself up over my past mistakes, and it was despair I held on to. I could no longer think positive, it left a bad taste in my mouth.”

Aoede: “You lived for far too long without any peace of mind, and because of that you chose the path of destruction?”

Noel: “I think it was the same with Caius. It didn’t matter how many times he lost Yeul, he couldn’t even kill himself out of despair, because he was immortal.”

“And that was why he made the wrong choice, and decided to destroy the world.”

“I was like that too. Looking back, I wasn’t the only one who lost it. Snow and Sazh, they each had their own problems and couldn’t see their way out. All of us were a little unhinged, somehow.”

Yeul: “But “the Saviour” – Lightning – returned, and freed the souls of the people that had up till then been trapped.”

Aoede: “What were you doing at that time, Yeul? You should have died in AF700...”

Yeul: “My soul... our souls were with Caius. Together, with the souls of all the priestesses named Yeul.”

“We were a vast number of souls merged together, and because of that we didn’t have a structured consciousness or will. We existed only as a free-floating, innocent desire.”

Noel: “She was in the shrine in the Wildlands, not so far away from Yusnaan or Luxerion. I had no idea she was so close at hand.”

Aoede: “Does that mean Caius lived there, too?”

Yeul: “He was neither alive nor dead. The feelings of the many Yeuls conflicted with each other – some Yeuls thought he had suffered despair for too long, and wished for death to set him free, but there were also Yeuls who didn’t want him to die, who wanted to be with him. “Our” contradicting feelings fused with the Chaos, and imprisoned his soul. There was no permitting him to disappear, then.”

Aoede: “Was Caius’s soul also reborn into this world?”

Yeul: “...He isn’t in the world you see. Caius is in the realm to which souls return. If you die, I’m sure you’ll meet him.”

Aoede: “So if he’s in the realm of Death...”

Yeul: “He protects the souls of the dead, shepherds them into a new life, rules the Unseen Realm – that is what he does.”

Aoede wraps up the interview, and the three of them pay a visit to the market. It’s just about lunchtime, and the marketplace is bustling with activity. There are looks of deep contentment on the faces of both Noel and Yeul, and Aoede thinks she knows why they chose to live among all this hubbub; for two souls who have known only an age of loneliness, the lively atmosphere must be a source of great comfort to them.

Yeul, who had been stiff and careful with her words in the interview, is now an entirely different person; she dances through the streets, pointing out curios to Noel with eyes that sparkle and a laugh that comes easily. Noel, a gentle look on his face, watches over her. Aoede thinks that it will be many, many years before the two of them will meet Caius Ballad in the realm of the dead again.

They have lunch together, but before they part ways Noel writes where to find Fang and Vanille in Aoede’s notebook.

Noel: “You’ll find Fang and Vanille here. Snow actually asked me for a favour. He told me that, if, after meeting you, I think you can be trusted, I should let you know where the two of them are.”

Noel then lightly complains about Snow and his lack of responsibility: he shouldn’t have left such an important decision to someone else. But even as he says this there’s a faint smile on his lips, and a nostalgic look in his eyes.

[Jun 26, 2014 at 10:35- 177 notes](#)